

VZCZCXRO3712
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHHI #3007 3471012
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 131012Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4117
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 2231
RUEHXS/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1150

UNCLAS HANOI 003007

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Department for EAP/MLS and IO/UNP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UN](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: VIETNAM SEEKS TO BOLSTER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION
CREDENTIALS BY HOSTING HUMANITARIAN LAW CONFERENCE

¶1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Vietnam recently co-hosted East Asia's first-ever conference on International Humanitarian Law, during which it pledged to take steps to strengthen its commitment to humanitarian law. Significantly, Vietnam's decision to host the conference is part and parcel of its efforts to bolster its international organization-related knowledge, expertise and credentials in support of its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UNSC for the 2008-2009 term. End Comment.

¶2. (SBU) Vietnam hosted East Asia's first-ever conference on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) from November 30 to December 1. The conference, entitled "International Humanitarian Law: New Treaties and Implementation, the East Asian Perspective," was co-hosted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and included the participation of officials from the Philippines, the PRC, Indonesia, Japan, the ROK, Cambodia and the DPRK. (Note: According to a colleague at the South Korean Embassy, the two DPRK participants were MFA Treaty Department officials who were silent throughout the conference. End Note.)

¶3. (SBU) The GVN's presentations focused heavily on the development and implementation of IHL in Vietnam, including the "humane treatment" of prisoners of war and deserters in its wars with France and the United States. During the conference, the GVN pledged to: bring its existing domestic laws in line with IHL treaties; finalize new laws on mutual legal assistance and protection of the Red Cross symbol; and, become a full party to the Convention on Anti-Personnel Mines, the Convention on Some Conventional Weapons Causing Excessive Injurious and Indiscriminate Effects and the Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property. The MFA is also planning to initiate a public awareness campaign on the importance of IHL, MFA Law and Treaties Department expert Vu Thi Mai Lien told us.

¶4. (SBU) According to ICRC Regional Delegation Head Fred Grimm (based in Bangkok), the MFA and others -- including the General Political Department of the People's Army of Vietnam -- have over the past year been increasingly interested in learning more about IHL and its applicability, particularly in peacekeeping operations. The MFA enthusiastically accepted the role of co-host, and Grimm surmised that the proposal to be the first-ever Asian host of an IHL conference held an additional cachet for the GVN.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Vietnam's aspirations to play a greater role on the international stage will culminate in its (likely) non-permanent membership on the UN Security Council for the 2008-2009 term. That said, the GVN recognizes that it faces a steep learning curve. Its decision to co-host this conference should be seen as part and parcel of its campaign to bolster its international organization-related knowledge, expertise and credentials. End Comment.

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